

A
S E R M O N

DELIVERED *September 3, 1788.*

AT THE
DUDLEIAN LECTURE

IN THE
CHAPEL OF HARVARD COLLEGE,

IN
CAMBRIDGE.

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B O S T O N :

PRINTED BY EDMUND FREEMAN OPPOSITE THE
NORTH DOOR OF THE STATE-HOUSE.

M,DCC,LXXXVIII.



S E R M O N.

EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS, I. 4.

DECLARED TO BE THE SON OF GOD WITH
POWER, ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT OF HO-
LINESS, BY THE RESURRECTION FROM THE
DEAD.

THE pious and honourable founder of this
Lecture having assigned *revealed religion*
as one of the subjects of investigation, the design
of the present discourse is to consider some of
the principal evidences on which the truth of re-
velation rests. It must be obvious to every one
who is acquainted with the subject, that a wide
and extensive field opens to view, and that to
traverse the several parts, must vastly exceed the
limits of a single discourse.—Several able and
worthy divines who have preceded me on this
subject, have confined themselves to some particu-
lar branch of it. One discourse was limited to
this single point, to prove that Jesus of Nazareth
was the promised Messiah*. The sole object of
another, was to consider that part of the evidence
which arises from miracles†—Others, who have
also

* By the Rev. Mr. Barnard of Marblehead.

† By the Rev. Mr. Barnard of Salem.

also been eminent in their profession, have taken a brief view of the several parts of this copious subject. I confess that the first of these methods has struck me as best calculated to answer the design of the institution. The internal evidence of christianity arising from the peculiar excellency of its doctrines and precepts, deserves particular attention. The exact accomplishment of a vast variety of prophecies in the successive periods of the world, many of which respect important events which fall within our own observation, affords a strong and undeniable argument of the truth of revelation. The evidence arising from the miracles of Christ and his apostles, however derided by some and misunderstood by others, will always have great weight with every unprejudiced mind.—Among the various incontestible proofs of our Saviour's mission, his resurrection from the dead, is the most interesting and important. This is the grand basis of the system; the corner-stone on which the whole building rests. For as St. Paul argues, if Christ be not risen, our preaching is vain, and your faith is vain also*.——Infidels, aware of the importance of this fact to the christian faith, have employed much art and address in attempting to overthrow it. Their objections however have paved the way for the fullest investigation of the subject, and the truth has been set in a clear view. However it may have happened, this particular point has not been considered on this occasion; which together with its magnitude and importance shall be my apology for paying some attention to it. That

* 1 Cor. 15. 14.

That there was such a person as Jesus of Nazareth, who appeared on the stage of human life more than seventeen hundred years ago, who delivered a system of doctrines and laws, and performed a variety of wonderful works in support of the truth of his mission, is a fact most clear and indisputable.—In this respect the friends and enemies of christianity are perfectly agreed. Celsus, Porphyry, Heriacles and Julian the apostate with other inveterate enemies of the christian cause, are compelled to acknowledge this truth.—Neither is there any dispute with respect to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ at Jerusalem, in the reign of Tiberius Cesar the Roman Emperor. The Jewish priests and rulers, who most ardently wished to prevent the spread of christianity, with subsequent historians bear the fullest testimony to this truth. But the case is far otherwise with respect to the resurrection of our Lord. From the time that the Sanhedrim hired the Roman soldiers to declare that the disciples stole away the body while they slept to the present day, various objections have been urged to invalidate the truth of this important fact. Before we proceed to a direct consideration of the subject, it is necessary to make some observations on the nature of evidence in general, and that kind of evidence in particular, which might reasonably be expected in attestation of a revelation from heaven.

“Evidence is the clear manifestation of truth to the mind, producing a ready assent to it.” Sometimes we discover truth by strict mathematical demonstration. From certain axioms or self-

self-evident principles we arrive by various gradations at other truths ; so that where the whole process is understood, there is no possibility of doubt. In this case, the premises are of such a nature as to render us infallibly certain of the conclusion.—In other instances, our assent is grounded upon the *testimony of our senses*. To this evidence St. John refers when he says, that which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the word of life, declare we unto you*. This is a kind of evidence most full and satisfactory, to which an appeal is always made, for the determination of the most interesting and important affairs in life. To reject the testimony of our senses would imply a gross reflection on the wisdom and goodness of our creator. This would be to suppose that he has by the constitution of our nature subjected us to unavoidable deception.

A third kind of evidence on which assent is grounded, is *credible testimony*, or the concurrent declaration of faithful witnesses with respect to certain facts which have fallen within their cognizance. With this proof men admit the truth of all past transactions. All historical facts, from the beginning of the world to the present day, depend upon it. The administration of justice and the support of civil government in the world, rest upon this basis. Without this kind of evidence a great part of the most useful knowledge must be given up. Upon this idea, as one observes, no sort of discovery, no experiment or observation

* 1 John 1. 1.

fervation which a man does not make himself, or
 see with his own eyes ; nay nor any demonstra-
 ble truth which he did not demonstrate himself
 is ever to be admitted or made use of, either by
 way of argument in discourse, or as a premise in
 any demonstration in order either to theory or
 practice. Every man must stand upon the basis
 of his own proper knowledge without light or
 information, without hints or suggestions from
 others*.—It has been alledged by deistical writ-
 ers, that the external evidence of christianity is
 diminished by time, and that the very nature of
 probability is such, that were it left to time itself,
 even that would wear it quite out. This repre-
 sentation is altogether inadmissible : For though
 the minds of men may be much less affected with
 remote transactions than with those which are re-
 cent, a fact which has once been sufficiently at-
 tested always claims our belief, unless contrary
 evidence is adduced. For instance, it is now as
 firmly believed that Julius Cesar was slain in the
 senate-house, as that General Montgomery fell
 before the walls of Quebec. If it was of the na-
 ture of credibility to be thus destroyed, all true
 history must by degrees degenerate into mere
 fable and faction. What is credible to-day
 would perhaps be incredible to-morrow. No
 real distinction could be left on this supposition
 between truth and falsehood, but we must be in
 a state of endless fluctuation and uncertainty.
 The truth is, mankind have never been in doubt
 with regard to a multitude of past facts and re-
 mote transactions. Modern infidels who urge
 in this case the ravages of time, have never pre-
 sumed

sumed to doubt the surprizing victories of Alexander the great, that the ancient Romans subdued all the neighbouring nations, or that they destroyed and burnt the famous city of Carthage. In all cases where christianity is not concerned, they admit these ancient facts without the least hesitation. It discovers extreme unfairness to receive this kind of proof in all other instances, and to reject it as applied to religion.

A being of infinite wisdom and goodness has been pleased to rest the truth of revelation principally on this kind of evidence. Christianity makes no pretensions to strict demonstration; neither are all men indulged the testimony of their own senses; but those important facts on which the truth of it depends, are attested by credible witnesses, who had neither ability nor inclination to impose a falsehood upon the world, and whose whole character bears the marks of the strictest integrity. On this evidence christians in all ages, have admitted the truth of our Saviour's resurrection, that most important fact which lies at the foundation of the whole system. If agreeably to the language of the text, God the father has declared Jesus Christ to be his son, by raising him from the dead, no man can refuse to admit the truth of *his mission* who believes the perfections of deity. It is impossible that any one who owns the truth of natural religion should suppose, that a being of infinite wisdom, goodness and veracity should ever set his seal to a lie, or give the best credentials to an impostor.

The way being now in some measure prepared, we proceed to consider the several proofs of
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the reality of our Saviour's resurrection.—That HE to whom all power belongs, can with the utmost ease raise one from the dead, is a point too clear to be called in question. However impossible such an event may be to any second cause, there is nothing in it which implies any absurdity or contradiction. HE, whose creative hand gave existence to unnumbered worlds, and to the various orders of creatures which inhabit them, and who established all those laws by which the general system is governed, must infallibly have the supreme direction and controul.—As the resurrection of Christ was evidently a subject of ancient prophecy, and as he had frequently declared that he must suffer death and rise again the third day, the Jewish rulers took the most effectual precautions to prevent any fraud.—They said to Pilate, Sir we remember that this deceiver said while he was yet alive, after three days I will rise again; command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure till the third day, lest his disciples come by night and steal him away, and say unto the people, he is risen from the dead. So the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, ye have a watch, go your way, make it as sure as you can; so they went and made the sepulchre sure sealing the stone and setting a watch*. As the prediction had fixed the third day for his resurrection, by having the dead body in their custody till after that day, they imagined they should abundantly defeat it, and know they had nothing to fear from it afterwards. Human policy could not

* Matthew 27. 63, 64.

not have adopted a more effectual method to prevent all fraud than that which was chosen by the Jewish rulers. The sepulchre was hewed out of a solid rock, and delivered to a company of soldiers with orders from their officer to guard it. But what are guards and centinels against the power of almighty God ! An angel of the Lord opened the sepulchre, the guards saw him and became as dead men. Terrified at the earthquake, and the radiant appearance of this heavenly messenger, some of them presently repaired to the city, and gave information to the chief priests and rulers, of those things which had hapened. It seems highly probable from what followed, that the soldiers were actual witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus. The deliberations of the Sanhedrim on this subject, and the measures which they took to suppress the story, plainly suppose that the guard assured them of the reality of his resurrection. Our Lord is indeed said to have appeared *first* to Mary Magdalene. This declaration is perfectly consistent with the idea that the soldiers saw him when he came out of the tomb. For that could not so properly be called an appearance after the resurrection, as the resurrection itself.

However this might be, our Lord shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of his disciples forty days*. Deistical writers have fondly represented the accounts which the several Evangelists have given of this important fact as being inconsistent with

* Acts I. 3.

with, and contradictory to, each other, and therefore, not worthy of credit.—I though there may be some disagreement, as to certain minute circumstances, yet their testimony to the fact itself, is substantially the same. Their several relations are of such a kind as to shew that there was no collusion in the matter, nor any preconceived plan with respect to their narration. Each one declared what he saw or heard in such order as seemed most natural, and in a manner most simple and unadorned. Had the four Evangelists, says one, written exactly in the same order, related only the same facts, reported only the same discourses, and reported them in the same words, I doubt not but our enemies would have cried out plain juggle and imposture! How is it possible these writers should have so exactly agreed in all these circumstances, had they not concerted these matters together, and resolved each to support the others account; or if each succeeding writer had not taken his account from the former, whereby in stead of being four distinct witnesses, they are in reality but one! And the objection from hence would have been stronger says he, than I have seen it drawn from any other article*. Several writers of distinguished abilities have considered, and compleatly refuted the objections drawn from the seeming inconsistency of the witnesses. The plan suggested by Mr. West is perhaps on the whole, most unexceptionable. It is needless to recite particularly the mode which he has adopted. To save time, I must refer you to the work itself, and
 proceed

* Dr. Chandler.

proceed to consider the number of witnesses attesting this fact, their character their stedfast adherence to their declaration amidst danger and death, &c. Let us attend for a moment to the number of the witnesses.—Our Lord appeared to men and women, to the eleven Apostles at sundry times; he ascended in the presence of an hundred and twenty, and St. Paul assures us that he was seen of more than five hundred brethren at once, the greater part of whom were alive when he wrote to the Corinthians, and who of course would have contradicted his account if it had not been true*.—Now though it is scarcely possible that a *single person* should be deceived with respect to a fact which was an object of sense, it is altogether incredible that so large a number should have been imposed upon. Can any person be so sceptical as to suppose that not one of the Apostles, not one of the hundred and twenty, or of the five hundred could tell what he saw, and heard and felt? It is not to be admitted that so many persons would unite in reporting a falshood, without the least prospect of any advantage. If the apostles had designed to impose a falshood upon the world, they would never have communicated the affair to so large a number, lest amidst such a variety of dispositions, some should have discovered the cheat. They must have recollected that of the small number of twelve, one had proved a traitor, and that among so many as five or six hundred, it was hardly possible that all should prove true to their trust. Had they been impostors, this very

* 1 Corinthians 15. 6.

ry circumstance would infallibly have ruined their cause. No rational account can be given of the number of witnesses but upon the idea that they were conscious of their integrity, and knew the truth of the fact to which they bore testimony.

As these witnesses were abundantly sufficient in number, to ascertain the truth of any fact which fell within their cognizance, so their character was such as to render their testimony highly credible.

They were persons of a fair, unblemished character, and therefore could not wish to deceive mankind in their most important interests. Their writings plainly discover their piety towards God, as well as their benevolence to men. Conscious of their integrity, they appeal to the omniscient God for the truth of what they delivered to the world. We do not find any charge of immorality or wickedness brought against them by their most inveterate enemies. If they had been persons of abandoned characters, the Jewish rulers would not have failed to have brought them to justice; but when they cited them before their tribunal, they accused them of nothing but preaching Jesus and the resurrection. So that malice itself can hardly indulge a suspicion that they were liable to any impeachment. It cannot therefore be admitted, that they would ever have wished to persuade the world that Christ was raised, unless they knew the truth of the fact.—Further, they appear in the whole of their conduct to have been
persons

persons of great plainness and simplicity. They were altogether unqualified to impose a falsehood upon the world, had they been wicked enough to have attempted it. "They had neither gifts of nature, nor advantages of education to lead a multitude, and to manage the passions of men." There is no appearance of art or address in their testimony, but they declare in the most simple, unaffected manner those things which they had seen and heard. They do not even attempt to conceal their own faults, but mention with the utmost frankness their dullness of apprehension, their incredulity, their doubts and fears. They relate without the least reserve, the perfidy of Judas, the denial of Peter, and their total dereliction of their master in the hour of distress. These are certain marks of fairness and impartiality, and serve to recommend their testimony to the belief of all men. However, though they had a large share of simplicity, yet they were not such weak and deluded mortals as some have represented, so as not to be certain of what they saw and heard. There is no appearance of wild enthusiasm, or an overheated imagination. There was nothing in their conduct which looked like fond credulity. They were extremely slow in admitting the truth of a fact, of which they had not the least expectation. They enquired with care and attention as to the reality of it, and never published it to the world till they had the fullest ocular demonstration. The incredulity of Thomas was carried to the greatest excess, and was at length removed by the most invincible evidence.

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Though they were illiterate men, yet they were as capable as others, of judging of a plain matter of fact. By their former intimacy with Jesus they could distinguish him from any other person.—When they saw him eat and drink before them, when they handled his body, and freely conversed with him for forty days, they must have been infallibly certain with respect to the identity of his person.—So that on the whole, they could not have been imposed upon themselves, neither had they ability or disposition to impose upon others.

We are further to consider their steadfast adherence to their declaration amidst danger and death. Soon after our Lord's ascension, his apostles published his religion in the city of Jerusalem. They ceased not to declare the innocence of their master, and boldly charged his death upon the priests and rulers as a most inhuman murder. No threatnings were sufficient to intimidate them. James one of the twelve, and Stephen, a man full of faith, and of the holy Ghost, soon fell sacrifices to the rage of persecution. Peter, one of the chief of the apostles, was committed to prison and the time fixed for his execution. The rest, nevertheless persevered in their declaration, and ceased not to preach Jesus and the resurrection. While they were exposed to every kind of indignity and contempt, from an unbelieving world, and death itself in the most tremendous forms, they never hesitated with respect to their testimony. We cannot, say they, but speak the things which we have seen and heard. We are his witnesses of these things,
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and so also is the holy Ghost, which God hath given to them that obey him*. Now though the sufferings of the apostles do not immediately prove the truth of Christ's resurrection, yet they are a good evidence of the sincerity of their declaration. There have indeed been instances where persons have suffered rather than relinquish false and erroneous opinions. But the case is widely different where men die for the truth of a matter of fact which they had seen themselves. "In doctrines, as Bishop Sherlock observes, men are always liable to mistake, and it is no reason for me to embrace another man's opinion because I think him sincere in it. But when a man reports to me an uncommon matter of fact, which is in its own nature an object of sense, if I believe him not, it is not because I doubt the testimony of his senses, but merely because I question his truth and sincerity. Since voluntary suffering for the truth is a good proof of sincerity, the suffering of the apostles for the truth of Christ's resurrection, is a powerful argument in support of the reality of it. The apostles gave up their lives in bearing testimony to the resurrection of their master. It was always in their power to quit their evidence and save their lives. Even their bitterest enemies required them only to be silent. Others have denied or asserted facts in hopes of saving their lives : but these men attest a fact at the expence of *their* lives which they might have saved by denying the truth. So that between criminals denying plain facts, and the apostles dying for their testimony, there is this material difference.

Criminals

* Acts 4, 20. 5, 32.

Criminals deny the truth in hopes of saving their lives, the apostles willingly parted with their lives rather than deny it."

Once more, the gifts of the holy Ghost which were imparted to the apostles and others, are a substantial proof of our Lord's resurrection. He assured them that they should receive power to execute the work assigned them, that the holy Ghost should come upon them, and that they should be his witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the uttermost parts of the earth*. The sacred historian assures us that this promise was fulfilled on the memorable day of Pentecost, when they received the gift of tongues and other miraculous powers necessary to support the truth of their mission. These powers began to be exercised at a publick festival in Jerusalem, in the presence of a vast multitude collected from all quarters. So that if these had not been real miracles, there was every possible advantage for detection. Now as God himself bore them witness with divers signs and miracles and gifts of the holy Ghost, their declaration was entitled to the fullest credit. The apostle in our text refers to these miraculous gifts when he says that Christ was declared to be the son of God with power *according to the spirit of holiness, or the holy spirit*. For though these miraculous powers did not directly prove the resurrection of Jesus, yet as they were agreeable to his own prediction, and bestowed at the very time which he had prescribed, as they were visible manifestations of the power of

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* Acts i. 8.

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God

* Acts i. 8.

God, it follows that the apostles either declared the truth, or else that God Almighty gave the highest possible attestation to a falsehood.—It has indeed often been suggested that evil spirits have a power of working miracles. But as the laws of nature are the established rules of the divine government, and essential to the order and happiness of the world, it cannot be rationally supposed that God ever delegates to his creatures a power of controuling those laws at their own pleasure. It is altogether inadmissible that opposite beings should in turn suspend the laws of nature, in order to support different systems. “This would entirely destroy the credit of miracles as criterions of truth, and credentials of a divine mission. A God of truth can never bear an immediate testimony to one as a divine messenger whom he has not sent, or who publishes his own inventions as the oracles of heaven.” He cannot consistently with his wisdom and benevolence, ever suffer any inferior beings by miraculous works to deceive his creatures. It must be added, that the rapid spread and propagation of the gospel in the world, against the strongest prejudices and the most violent opposition, serve to confirm the truth of Christ’s resurrection. The doctrines and precepts of christianity were totally opposite to the principles and views of Jews and Gentiles. All parties were confederated against it, though upon different motives; and yet it spread and triumphed. Within twenty five years after the death of Christ many myriads of Jews believed in him; and in a few years after, the gospel was propagated through all parts of the Roman empire; and thus agreeably to our Lord’s prediction

tion, being lifted up, he drew all men after him*. Now that a few men destitute of all the advantages of birth and education, bred up amidst the numerous prejudices and superstitions of their own nation, and engaged in the lowest occupations of life, should in a few years, propagate the christian religion in the world against the strongest prejudices, and the most violent opposition, is an event most astonishing, which never can be accounted for, but upon the idea that God was with them of a truth.

It must indeed be acknowledged, that false religions have been propagated with success. The Mahometan imposture had a rapid progress, and still exists in the world. But how was this system propagated? Was it by its own internal excellence, and by such proofs as are adapted to afford rational conviction to the minds of men? Was not this prophet arrayed in armor and blood, riding in triumph over thousands and ten thousands who fell by his victorious sword? How many cities did he consume! What an extent of country did he ravage and destroy! What wretchedness did he bring on the inhabitants of the earth! Were any such unhallowed means adopted by Christ and his apostles! What a striking contrast is there between this fierce invader of the sacred rights of mankind, and the benevolent, meek and humble Jesus, who came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them; who went about doing good to the souls and bodies of men, diffusing happiness in the family of
God!

* John 12. 32.

God ! Besides, did not this artful imposter adapt his religion as far as possible, to the lusts and passions of men ? Did he not by his precepts and example justify those practices to which mankind are extremely addicted ? Did he not promise his votaries a paradise which should give full scope to their unbridled appetites and inclinations ?— The religion and example of Jesus were totally opposite to this system. Christianity is levelled against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. It inculcates every virtue which can adorn human nature, and assimilate it to the pattern of perfection. The example of Christ was pure and spotless, calculated in every view to recommend and enforce that excellent religion which he taught. A comparison of the nature of the christian and mahometan systems and the mode of their propagation, must convince us that the argument drawn from the spread and actual existence of the former, remains in full force. These are some of the principal proofs on which the truth of our Saviour's resurrection rests. Several things have been alledged by the enemies of christianity in one age and another to invalidate this evidence, which may deserve notice.

The Jewish rulers alarmed at the idea of his resurrection and the probable consequences of it, immediately took measures to prevent the belief of this important fact. They hired the soldiers to declare that the body was stolen away by the disciples while they slept. This report, however improbable, has been believed by the Jews in all ages of the christian Church. No story was ever fabricated more absurd in itself. For men can
never

never say what is done while they are asleep. If the disciples had attempted to take away the body, and the guard knew it, they might with the utmost ease, have prevented it. If the body was taken away while they were asleep, it was impossible for them to say by whom it was done. Supposing they had been so regardless of their duty as to have fallen asleep, any attempt to rob the sepulchre must instantly have awaked them. The body was so deposited that its removal could not be effected without considerable noise. Besides, the Evangelist assures us, that the burying clothes were left in such order that there was no appearance of hurry and confusion, but all the marks of leisure and composure of mind.—It is extremely improbable that the disciples of our Lord should have attempted any thing of this kind. It does not appear that they had any expectation of his rising again. When he was laid in the tomb, all their hopes of his being the promised Messiah, were buried with him. It is therefore inconceivable that they should have contrived any account with respect to his resurrection. By stealing the body, they would have been guilty of a high offence, and liable to a heavy punishment, without the least expectation of support either from God or men in asserting the resurrection, which on this supposition, they knew to be false. Besides, if the Jewish rulers had believed this story themselves, and knew that there had been any collusion with respect to the removal of the body, why was there no attempt to confront and destroy the testimony of the apostles? This would certainly have been an act of
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or justice to themselves, and what they owed to their nation and to mankind.

Is it possible that men in these circumstances should never have attempted any investigation of the matter ? Is not their silence a strong presumptive proof that they knew the reality of Christ's resurrection ?

It has also been suggested by way of objection, that according to the account of the Evangelists, Christ was raised before the time fixed in the prediction. It must be observed that the words *meta treis émeras*, after three days do not signify either in the nature of the thing, or in constant acceptation, the completion of three times twenty four hours. It is evident that the Scribes and Pharisees understood by the third day only the commencement of that day. They demanded that a watch should be set till the third day, which plainly shews that had Christ risen on any part of that day to their conviction, they must have owned the accomplishment of the prophecy. Our Lord was crucified and laid in the tomb on Friday ; he continued there all Saturday, and early in the morning on what is now called the first day of the week, he arose ; which according to Jewish phraseology, was *three days* and *three nights*. We have a similar instance of computation in 1 Kings 12. 5. where Rehoboam says to the people, depart yet for three days and then come again, and yet all the people came to him the third day. In like manner, when the parents of Jesus missed him on their return from Jerusalem, it is said that they went back, and after three days, found him in the temple, i. e. the
third

third day. For they missed him after the first day's journey, returned the second day to the city, and on the third day they found him in the temple. Josephus, the Jewish historian, has a similar expression with respect to Isaac, *on eutheus met ogdoeen émeran peritemnoufi*, i. e. the eighth day. So that the expression in the prophecy exactly agrees with the event, when taken according to the use of language at that time.

The last objection which I shall notice, is that which is derived from our Lord's not appearing to the body of the Jewish nation. Infidels say, that he promised such an appearance, when he declared that no sign should be given, but the sign of the prophet Jonas; and that as Jonas was a sign to the Ninevites, so should the son of man be to that generation*. In reply to this it must be observed, that the prophecy never intimated that he should rise in the presence of the people or shew himself to the body of them, but only that sufficient and proper evidence should be exhibited of the truth of his resurrection. Jonas was a sign to the Ninevites, because they had proper evidence of his miraculous deliverance, though none of them perhaps saw him when he was thrown out of the fish. The prophecy of Christ was also literally and exactly fulfilled when the truth of his resurrection was attested by credible witnesses. The body of the Jewish nation had no reason to expect that Christ would appear to them; for his particular commission to that people terminated at his death, and he assured

* Luke 11. 29, 30.

assured them that they should see him no more till they were better disposed to receive him*. As the whole world was concerned in the truth of Christ's resurrection, it was necessary that such proof should be exhibited as was adapted to the satisfaction of all men. Who could be so well qualified to be the witnesses of this important fact, as those who had been intimately conversant with him, who knew his form and air, his voice and manner: If our Lord had appeared publickly to the Jews, it is probable that some of them would have been convinced; others would no doubt have persisted in their infidelity; so that future generations must after all, have depended upon the evidence of those very persons who were appointed to be the witnesses of his resurrection. Instead of gaining any thing by his publick appearance, we must have trusted to the evidence of the disciples, and this clogged with one incumbrance, viz. that some who saw him were not convinced. If the body of the Jewish nation had been convinced by such a publick appearance, this would not have been sufficient to satisfy modern infidels. They could have no other evidence of the fact than testimony, and therefore according to their own system, must continue in doubt. Persons of this character are not the more ready to admit the reality of the miracles of Moses in Egypt and at the Red sea, because they were wrought before all the people. If the testimony of several hundreds of credible persons who had the best possible opportunity for knowing the truth, and who were ready to seal

* Luke 13. 35.

seal their declaration with their blood, is not admitted, there is no probability that an augmentation of their number to any amount whatsoever, would afford conviction. "If they hear not Moses and the Prophets," Christ and his apostles, there is no probability that they would be persuaded, "though one rose from the dead" and appeared personally to every individual.—The time will not admit of enlarging any further, I will relieve your patience by concluding with some remarks on the doctrine which has been considered.

If Christ has been *declared to be the son of God with power by* his resurrection from the dead, then we may rest assured that the christian religion is of divine original. It is evident that "we have not followed cunningly—devised fables, and that our faith stands not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." For surely the almighty and benevolent Father of all, would never have thus honoured an impostor and have given credit to his impious undertaking. This is the highest possible attestation which could ever be given to any messenger from heaven. So that he who doubts the divine mission of Jesus Christ must either believe that it is within the reach of human power to raise the dead, or else that a being of all perfection has adopted the most effectual method to lead mankind into error and delusion. The resurrection of Jesus is at once a striking instance of two of the best kinds of evidence in support of revelation; I mean miracles and prophecies. This was itself an illustrious miracle, far exceeding the limits of created power. It was also an exact fulfilment

of exprefs predictions delivered by preceding prophets and by Chrift himfelf. If therefore the proof of this fact is fatisfactory to our minds, we cannot for a moment doubt the truth of the gospel revelation ; and if we admit this, the writings of Mofes and the Prophets cannot be difcredited, becaufe they all refer ultimately to Chrift, and were completely accomplished in him. The old and new Testaments are closely and infeperably connected, and muft ftand or fall together.—Again, it follows, that while infidels are constantly charging Chriftians with fond credulity, they themfelves have an uncommon fhare of it. For fince the Chriftian religion has been propagated and ftill exists in the world, upon their principles they muft admit, that a few poor illiterate fifhermen were able to contend with the prejudices of all the world, the fuperftition of the people, the interefts of the priefts, the pride of the philofophers, the malice of the Jews, the learning of Greece and the power of Rome. They muft believe alfo, that a number of the vileft impoftors that ever appeared in this world, have publifhed the moft excellent fystem of morality which mankind was ever favoured with. They will be compelled to own, that thefe men fubmitted to the moft grievous fufferings, and to death itfelf, in vindication of what they knew to be falfe, without the moft diftant profpect of any reward whatfoever. Thefe and fundry other things which might be mentioned, which undeniably follow from their principles, are totally oppofite to the eftablifhed order of nature, and are facts as miraculous as any recorded in the New Testament. Further, it follows that the prevalence
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of infidelity is not owing to the want of evidence of the truth of our holy religion, but to some other causes. Under the continuance and progress of christianity, its evidence has been growing and gathering strength. The more thoroughly this system has been canvassed, with the brighter lustre does its evidence appear. 'The continual accession of strength from the exact accomplishment of prophecies, of which in many instances, we have ocular demonstration, is an overbalance for any supposed diminution, with respect to the proof arising from miracles. The want of the testimony of our senses which the apostles and primitive christians had, is supplied by an increase of evidence of another kind, in the same manner (if the similitude may be admitted,) that the loss of luminous matter from the sun is supplied by a communication of light from the fixed stars; or as others suppose, by absorbing comets into it. The wisdom and contrivance of divine providence being no less admirable in the moral, than the natural world; no less in the light which God gives us from and concerning the sun of righteousness, than in the supply of that of the sun in the firmament.'

Deism oftentimes results from the pride of the human heart. Men who have a high sense of their own abilities and philosophical knowledge, are not willing to admit the truth of revelation, because there are some things in it above human investigation. They forget that natural religion is liable to the same objection; and that philosophy itself, so far as it relates to the abstract natures of things, is a science full of arcana, which the utmost stretch of genius has hitherto been
unable

unable to disclose. If these persons are resolved to believe nothing which they cannot fully comprehend, the being of God and his providence, together with their own existence must be called in question and all the phænomena of nature whose causes have not been investigated, must be peremptorily denied.

It is very possible, that an affectation of courage may in some instances, have betrayed men into infidelity. Some flatter themselves that it is a sure indication of courage to call in question that which the world holds sacred. A late author* remarks, that when the philosopher of Malmesbury in the last century, resolved all morality and religion into the will of the magistrate, the bold singularity of the paradox was, no doubt, that which chiefly recommended it to himself, as well as surprized the world into an opinion of his bravery; though we know from his story that he had no more of this virtue, than might have consisted with faith and the fear of God. But vain man, says he, oft affects to make a shew of that which he does not possess, and thus his defect in true courage, may be the reason why he pretends to so much of it.

It will hardly be thought a breach of charity to suppose, that many have rejected revelation on account of its opposition to their favorite vices: or in the language of our Savior, "that they love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil."

Immersed in worldly pursuits and sensual pleasures, men cannot endure the holy precepts of the New Testament. They secretly wish that there

* Bishop Hurd.

was not sufficient evidence to support this system. When they come enquire, small objections thro' the force of prejudice, appear to them insuperable, and they are easily prevailed on to reject the gospel. If they would with honest, impartial minds consider the nature and design of the christian institution, and the evidence of the facts recorded in the New-Testament, they would presently be satisfied of its truth. If they were seriously disposed to practise the duties of natural religion, the gospel would appear to them "worthy of all acceptance."

This literary society, founded by the wisdom of our ancestors, has under the smiles of heaven been happily instrumental of promoting the knowledge and belief of christianity in our land. Many of its sons have risen to distinguished eminence and usefulness in church and state, and their names will be transmitted with honor to the latest generations. May a noble emulation be excited in the breasts of the students in this university to exceed all who have gone before them in intellectual and moral attainments. The distinguishing advantages which you now enjoy, the expectations of your friends and your country, as well as your present peace and future happiness, all urge you to vigorous pursuit and unremitting application. While you advance in the delightful paths of science, and survey the wonders which modern philosophy opens to your view, ever carry your thought up to the first cause, the original source of existence. Sensible of the weakness and imperfections of the human mind, and of the doubt and uncertainty of the best heathen philosophers with respect to religious truths, receive the gospel revelation

with gratitude and joy. Examine its evidence with candor and impartiality. Be not shaken in mind either by the sophistical reasonings or the profane banter of men of depraved hearts. Never indulge an idea that it is an argument of weakness or fond credulity to admit the truth of revelation. Many of the most distinguished philosophers which the world ever produced, have been firm believers in the christian system, and have done themselves immortal honor by their writings in support of it, and their dying testimony to it. Let all your searches after truth be accompanied with a temper and practice conformable to the eternal and immutable rules of reason and religion. May you be trained up for eminent service among the multitude of your brethren, and finally be qualified for that state where every thing which is mysterious and unintelligible shall be cleared up, and the whole intellectual world be open to your view.

Finally, with what unfeigned gratitude should we all "bless the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who by his resurrection from the dead, has begotten us to the lively hope of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. Since "Christ is risen as the first fruits of them that slept," we cannot doubt the truth and certainty of our own resurrection. This is a noble discovery of revelation. May we be raised in our desires and pursuits above all the vanities of this transitory life, and be "looking for the blessed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ."

9:7:49
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